

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name Winnett BlockOther names/site number Petroleum County Courthouse**2. Location**street & number 301 E. Main Street☐ not for publicationcity or town Winnett☐ vicinityState Montana code MT county Petroleum code 069 zip code 59087**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide x locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Deputy SHPO_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title_____
Date_____
or Federal agency and bureau_____
State**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper_____
Date of Action

___ entered in the National Register

___ See continuation sheet

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ See continuation sheet

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

☐ private
☒ public - Local
☐ public - State
☐ public - Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
1		buildings
		sites
	1	structures
		objects
1	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

GOVERNMENT: County Courthouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: County Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American
Movements: Commercial Style-Western
Commercial Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: STONE: Sandstone block

roof: Single-ply Neoprene Sheet

other: GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Please see continuation sheet

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☒ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Politics/Government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1917-1959

Significant Dates

1917 – Construction

1928 – Remodeled and Leased to County

1942 – Sold to County

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Walter J. Winnett

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Please see continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Please see continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: Petroleum County Public Library

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet) NAD27

1	<u>12</u>	<u>701597</u>	<u>5208843</u>	3	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

The Winnett Block occupies Lots 10-12 in Block 7 of the original Winnett plat. It is located in the NENESW of Section 6, T14N R27E, in Petroleum County, Montana.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

This is legal boundary of the property that has not physically changed since the building was built in 1917. The boundary includes the building that has historically been referred to as the Winnett Block, and later as the Petroleum County Courthouse. It encompasses the lots owned by Petroleum County.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>Laura Nowlin</u>		
organization	<u>Petroleum County, Montana</u>	date	<u></u>
street & number	<u>1200 Cosgriff Ct</u>	telephone	<u>406-366-6838</u>
city or town	<u>Cheyenne</u>	state	<u>WY</u> zip code <u>82001</u>

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps: A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name	<u>Petroleum County</u>		
street & number	<u>301 E. Main Street</u>	telephone	<u>406-429-5311</u>
city or town	<u>Winnett</u>	state	<u>MT</u> zip code <u>59087</u>

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Narrative Description

SETTING

The Winnett Block is significant for the role it played in the development of the town of Winnett and Petroleum County, its association with Mr. Walter J. Winnett, and for its architecture. The building was constructed in 1917 as a commercial block and became the Petroleum County Courthouse in 1928. Its period of significance begins with its construction in 1917 and extends to 1959, the fifty year National Register of Historic Places cut-off date, as it continues to serve as the Petroleum County Courthouse and house the only county manager form of government in Montana.

Dominating a corner lot at the east end of Main Street in Winnett, Montana, a small central Montana town, the Winnett Block stands out as the largest building in town. The Winnett Block is located at 301 East Main Street on the northeast corner of Main Street and Ashley Avenue in the northeast portion of the town, which is the county seat of Petroleum County. The 1917 building faces south, fronting Main Street, with the west elevation functioning as a secondary façade. Main Street has always been, and continues to be, an important part of the Winnett business corridor with many of the town's businesses situated along this street. The Winnett Block is a solid architectural element in the town. The Winnett Block retains much of the original design intent, conveys its historic associations, and is in good condition.

There are no landscape features surrounding the building. A metal shop and an open gravel lot used for parking occupy the space north of the building, while a historic hardware store sits five feet to the east. A sidewalk runs east-to-west in front of the building. To the west of the courthouse, across Ashley Street, is an empty lot and to the south, across Main Street, is a residence.

Description of Resources

The Winnett Block (constructed 1917, one contributing building)

Exterior Description

The Winnett Block is a parapet-roofed rectangular two story commercial building constructed of sandstone blocks that sits on a full basement. It is constructed with sandstone blocks and has a parapet roof protected with single-ply Neoprene sheeting. The building measures 75' by 75'. The dominant window type is one-over-one wood sash with smooth cut stone lintels and flat stone sills. A concrete covering caps the building.

South Elevation

The south (front) elevation is divided into three sections separated by sandstone columns. The different sections help differentiate the original multi-business use of the building. The elevation

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contains simple glass one-light double doors with an overhead transom which serves as the main entrance into the building. Originally the three sections displayed plate glass windows that were replaced by one-over-one double hung windows circa 1928; circa 1977 these were replaced with the side-by-side aluminum sliders and stucco siding present at the time of this writing. Although the modifications have resulted in the removal of the original windows, the divisions that originally partitioned the business block into three main floor businesses are still visible. Stone sills add detail to this plain first story. Three large brick vents that have been covered with parging are spaced evenly across the south elevation. A stringcourse of white painted sandstone marks the division between the first and second floors. The second floor contains twelve one-over-one double-hung wood sash windows. These windows contain stone lintels and sills. A pressed tin cornice containing an entablature is located just below the roof line.

West Elevation

The west elevation faces Ashley Avenue. From south to north, the main floor elevation contains two pairs of windows, a doorway that was blocked-in at an undetermined date (see "Alterations" at the end of this section) with sandstone, and one more window on the first floor. The second floor has seven evenly spaced windows. The windows are all one-over-one double-hung wood sash with stone lintels and sills. The north corner of the second story contains stone that has been plastered over with parging, perhaps as an attempt to protect it from the weather. This elevation also displays the new air conditioning unit installed in the early 2000's that has pipes and cables running from an outlet in the sidewalk along the base of the building into the wall.

North Elevation

The north elevation of the building contains the back entrance, which consists of a single modern door with a single-light in the center of the upper half of the door. A small shed roof addition projects north from the approximate center of the north wall; it houses a set of stairs that lead to the basement. A fire escape leads from the second story. A large modern exterior brick chimney projects north from the northeast corner of the building. Windows on the first floor consist of one small single light fixed sash window to the west of the entrance, and three two-over-two fixed light wood sash; four one-over-one double-hung wood sash windows run across the second floor. Their spacing is uneven and they do not match up vertically because of interior rooms.

East Elevation

The east elevation displays an uneven footprint. While the rest of the building is square, this wall contains a historic chimney on the northeast corner that extends 3' out from the wall and has been plastered over with parging and is no longer used. At a point 22' from the south end, the wall angles back out to the east. The four windows on the first floor are twelve-light fixed sash and nine on the second floor are one-over-one double hung wood windows. This elevation also contains parging over most of the wall.

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Interior Description

The interior of the Winnett Block consists of three floors; a finished basement, a main floor where courthouse duties are performed, and a second floor that contains the Sheriff's office and is otherwise empty. The main floor and second floor share all of the same detailing consisting of a tall baseboard with a base shoe, doors that are the full height of the wall, operable hopper sash transom windows, flatboard trim, and hoods with small cornices.

Basement

The basement was remodeled into a public space in 1977 and was changed considerably from its original form. Major changes made at that time have been only slightly modified since. The basement consists of a large open area with only a vault, bathrooms, a kitchen in the center and one small room at the southwest corner. This open area is somewhat defined by two exposed beams that run north to south and are evenly spaced across the width of the area.

Main Floor

The main floor of the Winnett Block has housed county government offices and a courtroom since 1928 and has had only minor superficial changes since that time. The main floor contains the courtroom in the center of the floor and rooms that extend to the exterior from hallways on either side of the courtroom. There is a large staircase leading to the second floor; it is wide and makes a 180° turn to the landing on the second floor. While it still has its original banister, the wall was finished from the ceiling to the top of the banister during more recent remodels. Flooring on the main floor consists of original hardwood, bare concrete, and carpet in the hallways and courtroom.

Courtroom

The courtroom is completely contained in the center of the main floor with entrances to the back (south), left and right (west and east) sides, and at the front right (northeast) corner. This corner entrance emanates from the jury room. The jury seats are located on the east side of the room and the judge's bench is situated near the north wall with windows on either side. A skylight, which was covered in the 1970's, is located over the seating area.

Third Floor

The 1928 alterations made to the third floor are unchanged except for the southeast corner, which houses the Petroleum County Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's office occupies two rooms east of the staircase landing and at the front (south) of the building. The rest of the floor is empty. The third floor mirrors the second, with halls down both sides and rooms opening off the hallways to the west and east. A small room in the center of the floor is positioned above the skylight to the courtroom. This room contains interior windows that light the center of the floor.

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Shed (constructed 2005, one non-contributing structure)

A rectangular gable roofed shed, built in 2005, sits north of the north east corner of the Winnett Block. The shed has two garage doors on the north elevation and a man door with no windows at the south end of the west elevation. There are no windows. The shed is clad in sheet metal siding and has cornerboards.

ALTERATIONS

The Winnett Block is largely unchanged from its completion in 1917. However, in 1928, Benjamin Lepper purchased the building from Mr. Winnett and remodeled it into a courthouse. At this time, a series of changes were made to the building. The façade received its first changes (see 1950's photo). Originally, the building contained three separate entrances. The west and east large business entrances were converted into three series of windows, while the smaller middle entrance remained. Because the entrance is located off-center, the window series did not match each other, and each was separated by a sandstone column. The first series consisted of two pair of two one-over-one double hung windows and then a separate single pane fixed-sash window. The second series consisted of a single pane fixed-sash window and then two one-over-one double hung windows. The third series consisted of two one-over-one double hung windows and then three one-over-one double hung windows. All the windows had transom lights above them. The southwest corner of the building is bordered by Main and Ashley streets and originally had a picture window on the west elevation as well. This window was replaced with one-over-one double hung windows instead. The northwest corner of the building contains a blocked-in door; this was most likely done with the 1928 remodel, however it may have been done with the modifications made in the 1970's.

In 1979, the basement was remodeled into the open space seen today. Around this time, the façade was also changed. The picture windows were changed to smaller sliding windows and the extra space was filled in with plywood that has since been painted white.

INTEGRITY

Though the building has evolved through time, none of the changes severely detract from the building's original function as a large commercial block. The Winnett Block retains a high level of integrity of materials, workmanship, location, and design. Remodels and updating resulted in the change of, and in-filling of, some windows and an entrance; however, these changes are small and the building remains easily able to convey its original construction intent as a business block.

The Winnett Block retains a high degree of integrity of setting, feeling, and association. When the Winnett Block was originally constructed, Winnett was experiencing a population boom and was a

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

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center of economic activity in the region. This boom lasted for only a short time, however; by the Great Depression and when Petroleum County adopted the County Manager form of government in the 1940s, Winnett's size had decreased considerably. The setting, feeling, and association from that time are reflected by the building today. No other buildings this size or style of construction exist in Winnett. It is truly distinctive within the town as an enduring symbol of Winnett's dreams of future progress.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The Winnett Block is significant under Criteria A, B, and C for the many roles it played in the history of Petroleum County. Its period of significance encompasses 1917, its date of completion, to 1959. It represents the growth of the Winnett community and its fight to become a county, it is closely associated with Mr. Winnett, the founder of the community, and it is a unique architectural style for the town. It symbolizes the positive attitude of the town when people were flocking to Winnett to live. It stood during the height of Winnett's population of approximately 2,000 and watched as the town dwindled to today's number of 180.

From 1910-1919 homesteaders staked their claims on 320 acres of land advertised as perfect for farming. Approximately twenty towns and communities grew up to support the surrounding population. After a debilitating drought beginning in 1917 worsened in 1919, those who had arrived only a few short years before realized that the prairie of Petroleum County would not allow survival on only 320 acres. The exodus began in 1919. It slowed for a few years due to an oil strike at Cat Creek, twenty-two miles east of Winnett. The Frantz Corporation struck oil in February 1920 and by 1922 Winnett's population increased from 316 to 1,213. The strike resulted in a brief five-year boom. By 1930 Winnett's population dropped to 408.

The Great Depression hit the area hard, although many New Deal programs helped people survive. Still, many more residents left. In 1942, Petroleum County adopted the county manager form of government in an effort to cut costs and reduce debt. The county continues to slowly lose people and today the population stands around 500 people; Winnett is the only surviving town and is home to about 180.

The Winnett Block is significant under Criterion A for the role it played in the homestead boom era of Winnett and also for the service it provided later as the county courthouse. First known as the Winnett Block, the building was finished in 1917 and provided many businesses with places of operation. This large business building represents the growth and development resulting from the homestead rush into the area. It also represents the hopes for the future of the town as it was the first stone business building constructed in Winnett. Following the creation of Petroleum County in 1924, the Winnett Block became the Petroleum County Courthouse in 1928 and has served that purpose ever since. It houses the only county manager form of government in Montana (a form of government using a manager appointed by the county commissioners, who in turn appoints positions that otherwise are elected condensing the number of offices and personnel to save money -see Section 8, pg. 20 and 21).

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The Winnett Block is significant under Criterion B for its association with Mr. Walter Winnett. Mr. Winnett was a successful cattle rancher who established the town of Winnett and was influential in the formal incorporation of the town as part of eastern Fergus County. He started a school in 1907 and a post office in 1910, neither of which are extant. He was also involved in major water works projects in the area. While he never served in an official capacity, Mr. Winnett contributed to the development of the town by building several buildings, by starting the first store, bar, school, and post office, and by continuing to build his own ranching business. He contracted stonemasons to build the Winnett Block in 1917. The building served as offices, a restaurant, and a bank. While probable, it is unclear whether or not Mr. Winnett ever conducted any of his own business out of the Winnett Block. He sold the property to Benjamin Lepper, who later leased the building to Petroleum County for use as a courthouse.

This is the only surviving building associated with Walter Winnett. As the property owner, the Winnett Block was built for him, and he was undoubtedly involved with the building process. Mr. Winnett was directly involved with many businesses and buildings in the town, however, the others no longer stand, including the ranch headquarters for the Winnett Ranch. The Winnett Block is significant for its connection to the founder of Winnett and local leader during the formative days of the town.

The Winnett Block is significant under Criterion C for its representation of an early 20th century commercial architectural style and rare method of construction in the town and region. The Winnett Block is the largest historic building in Winnett, the only building built as a business block, and the only building constructed of stone. Its scale is much more massive than any other building that remains in town today. Other commercial buildings were frame construction and meant to house one business while the Winnett Block was intended for multiple businesses. Under Criterion C, the Winnett Block is a fine example of a Western Commercial style building, a style generally found along railroads in Montana's communities.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Located only fifty miles from the exact geographic center of Montana is the tiny town of Winnett. Winnett (elevation 2950 ft.) sits on the prairie with a view of the Judith Mountains to the west and the Little Snowy Mountains to the southwest. A sandstone bluff ("the Rims") rises to the southeast of town. McDonald Creek flows west to east, south of town. The town was originally located in Fergus County; however, with the creation of Petroleum County in 1924, it became the county seat of the newly created county. Settlers arrived in the future Petroleum County area as early as the 1860s. Scattered settlements, mostly trading posts established on major travel routes, sprouted up beginning in the mid-1860s. From then until about 1910 the stockmen ruled the range, developing it enough to

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establish a few small communities with post offices. Homesteaders flooded into the area beginning around 1910, the same year Winnett received a post office.

While the journals of Lewis and Clark comprise the first known written records of Montana, archaeological evidence places mankind in Montana as early as 13,000 years ago. By the late 18th century, a vibrant Plains Indian culture inhabited the Northern Great Plains region east of the Rockies. The period from 1650–1805 saw changes in the Plains culture due to the arrival of European trade goods. These trade goods and especially the introduction of the horse, which reached Montana in 1700-1750, led once separate groups to follow the same subsistence patterns and compete for the same resources. With the ability to move further and faster on horseback, intertribal conflicts became more common. In addition, the ability to carry more belongings contributed to the accumulation of wealth and created a more elaborate status and social ranking system. At the time of full scale European contact with explorers Lewis and Clark in 1805, a variety of tribes inhabited the area that eventually became Petroleum County. These groups were the Assiniboiné, Atsina, Blackfoot, Blood, Chippewa-Cree, Crow, Piegan, Sioux, and Shoshoni. Also occupying the region for short periods of time were the Arapahoe and Cheyenne. These nomadic Plains tribes were all horseback hunting groups that pursued bison herds.¹

Native Americans and fur trappers co-existed in an unpredictable relationship of peace and violence. Small pox epidemics in the 1830s swept across the northern Plains, killing thousands of Indians. The Blackfeet made gains against the encroaching whites in 1855 with Lamé Bull's Treaty. This treaty established Blackfeet Territory in the area extending from the Rockies east to the mouth of the Milk River, and from the Canadian border south to the Three Forks of the Missouri and the Musselshell River, an area encompassing all of present day Petroleum County. The gold strikes and increased Missouri River traffic soon led to the dissolution of this treaty. The bison herds diminished and cattle took their place. In 1876, the Battle of the Little Bighorn in southeastern Montana saw the Sioux crushing General Custer; however, by the 1880s most Native American tribes were forced to reservations.²

Native Americans had lived on the northern Plains for thousands of years before European arrival. European contact irreversibly altered their lives as well as the landscape in which they dwelled. Spurred by the fur trade, whites settled Montana in a wave from west to east. Occupants consisted mostly of fur trappers following beaver populations. While fur companies built trading posts along the major waterways, the interior of the massive region remained mostly unsettled and unexplored. It

¹ Stephen Aaberg and Steven Davenport, "Carrell Oil Company," Lewistown BLM District Proposed Land Exchange, Petroleum County, Montana, Class III Cultural Resource Survey Results, April 1997, p. 16.

² Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Land. *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, revised edition. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 1991, p. 57-59.

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was not until the 1860s that a white presence became more permanent in the form of struggling settlements and overland transportation routes.³

After initial exploration up the Missouri River and through Montana, various groups of adventuresome men set out to create more permanent settlements. These men usually harbored business intentions and most established trading posts that served both the Native Americans and fur trappers. From the 1860s through the early 1880s, points of settlement developed in what became Petroleum County but what was first Meagher County and later Wheatland and then Fergus Counties along the mouth of the Musselshell River and to the south, along Flatwillow Creek.⁴

From 1860 through the 1880s, white settlement in what was to become Petroleum County struggled to gain a foothold. Attempts at establishments in the northern part of the county failed after only a few years. In the meantime, Flatwillow, in the southern portion of the county slowly developed out of a trading post on a stage line. With the arrival of a post office in 1883, Flatwillow officially became a town and helped to support other settlement throughout the county. The cattlemen and sheepmen comprised the initial settlement in the area by establishing their headquarters on the prairie in the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁵ Fergus County was created out of Wheatland County in 1885 and named after James J. Fergus, a Montana pioneer and businessman. It encompassed all of present day Petroleum County.⁶

Walter J. Winnett

The Winnett Block is the last remaining building associated with the founder and fosterer of the Winnett community. Mr. Walter Winnett's influence on, and commitment to, the community ensured its survival, while many surrounding communities did not. He worked continuously to improve conditions in Winnett and the Winnett Block is a lasting testament to the creator of the town.

A number of men established large cattle and sheep ranches on the land of eastern Fergus County, which was created out of Wheatland County in 1885. The country on McDonald Creek, below the sandstone rimrocks, provided the perfect location for Walter J. Winnett to start his ranching operation. Mr. Winnett arrived in 1879 (some reports say 1883).⁷ His closest neighbors, the Lepper and Garl

³ Laura Nowlin, *Historic Preservation in Deep Rural Places: A Historic Resources Study of Petroleum County, MT*, University of Oregon Graduate Thesis, June 2008, p. 45.

⁴ Nowlin, p. 46.

⁵ Nowlin, p. 53.

⁶ Fergus County Courthouse, <http://www.co.fergus.mt.us/>, March 7, 2009.

⁷ According to a Winnett Times article quoted in the Pages of Time, Mr. Winnett arrived in 1883, however, multiple other newspaper articles and short histories written on Mr. Winnett, including one by his daughter, Mirth Keihl Hedman, claims he arrived in 1879.

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Ranch, operated near Flatwillow, about 12 miles to the south. A trading post conducted business at the east end of his property, near the confluence of Box Elder Creek and Flatwillow Creek. Mr. Winnett arrived in the area at just twenty years of age and after eight adventure-filled years on the Montana plains.⁸

The story of Walter John Winnett begins in Toronto, Canada, where he was born in 1859. His family owned and operated the "Crystal Palace". His head filled with stories of the west, Winnett ran away from home at age twelve to find his own adventures.⁹ Arriving in Montana about 1870, Winnett,

... viewed the falls of the Missouri, shot buffalo, drew a man's wage freighting with a bull team, and within a short time invested his savings in a 44 Henry rifle and several thousand rounds of cartridges, and proceeded to qualify as an expert marksman, trapping and hunting for a livelihood.¹⁰

Winnett met and began traveling with Captain Fowler, an old trapper who had previously been employed by the Canadian Government to supply meat for the railroad crews. The two adventured up and down the Missouri River, trapping and hunting.

The explanations for the period of Winnett's life between joining Fowler and arriving on McDonald Creek vary. The stories all share some consistencies, which are that he lived with the Sioux and adopted their ways for a few years, where his expert marksmanship earned him the Indian nickname of "Eagle Eyes." He left the Sioux about the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.¹¹ Winnett first settled in the Moore area, west of Lewistown, but found the winters at the higher elevation too cold and moved east to McDonald Creek.¹²

After constructing a one-room log cabin on the creek, Winnett set about building up his spread. Neighbor Benjamin Lepper encouraged his start in the sheep business; at the same time, Winnett also engaged in the freighting business. After his first cabin washed away in a flood, he relocated about a mile east of the first site, at the southeast end of what is today Main Street in Winnett. At this location he built a three-room log house, a barn, corrals, and sheds all clustered together within the

⁸ "The Life of W.J. Winnett: Winnett, MT," Petroleum County Library, vertical family file, *Winnett, Walter J.*, p. 1.

⁹ "The Life of W.J. Winnett: Winnett, MT," p. 1.

¹⁰ "Winnett, Founder of Oil Metropolis, Talks of Time When He Was With Sioux and in Confidence of Sitting Bull," *The Fergus County Argus*, Montana Historical Society Research Library, vertical file, *Winnett*, c. 1920.

¹¹ Some stories claim Winnett was gone with a hunting party when the battle took place. They heard it and went back to the camp, only to find Custer and his men dead. Winnett is rumored to be the first white man to see Custer's body. His daughter, Mirth Keihl Hedman, however, believes he left the Sioux prior to the battle.

¹² "The Life of W.J. Winnett: Winnett, MT," p. 1; Petroleum County Public Library, p. 808; "Winnett, Founder of Oil Metropolis, Talks of Time When He Was With Sioux and in Confidence of Sitting Bull," p. 1.

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shadows of the majestic sandstone rimrocks rising above McDonald Creek. Unlike many early stockmen, Winnett realized the importance of irrigation and harvested feed for his stock. He built an irrigation system on the creek that watered approximately 3,000 acres. He plowed the fields and leveled them using a railroad rail pulled by four teams of horses. He was also instrumental in the development of the Winnett Irrigation Company, which created an extensive irrigation system that unfortunately, successfully operated for only a few short years. This was the first large-scale irrigation project in the area; it was also constructed at a time that most believed dry land farming would be successful in the region. In 1882, the famous cowboy artist, Charlie Russell, spent the winter, during which he and Winnett developed a lasting friendship.¹³

In 1898, Winnett met and married Mary Jenkins, who had arrived in Musselshell from St. Louis, after being advised by her doctors to move west to a drier climate due to lung problems. Winnett took her to the ranch and added two rooms to the three room cabin. Their first three children, Pearl, Bertha, and Mirth entered the world in this cabin. In 1900, lumber began to be sawn for a new Winnett house. Winnett owned a sawmill located west of town on a ridge above War Horse Lake. All but the finish lumber was sawn here. The large logs came from the Missouri River Breaks. This two-story eleven-room home was the largest, and first, two-story house in the area. In addition, four rooms were added to the rear for the Winnetts' female servants and for Mr. Winnett's office. The last three Winnett children, Arthur, Edith, and Lewis were born in this house. The Winnett house provided a center for community activities ranging from funerals, weddings, and church meetings, to dances and business gatherings. It also served as the first school in Winnett in 1907.¹⁴ The Winnett House no longer stands (see additional documentation). At this point, the history of Mr. Winnett and the town of Winnett merge.

Brief History of the Town of Winnett and Petroleum County

Built during the height of homestead settlement in the area, and coinciding with the arrival of the first train in Winnett, the Winnett Block represents the growth of the town. This stone business block signaled the permanence of the town, its readiness to build large commercial buildings, and its aspirations about its future. Becoming the county courthouse in 1928, four years after the creation of the county, the Winnett Block came to symbolize and serve, as it does today, all the functions of the local county government. It is also the home of the only County Manager form of county government in Montana.

The Town of Winnett

¹³ "The Life of W.J. Winnett: Winnett, MT," p. 1-3.

¹⁴ Petroleum County Public Library, *Pages of Time: A History of Petroleum County*, Lewistown, Montana: New-Argus Printing, 1990, p. 808.

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The Montana plains became desirable to homesteaders only after 1900, with the development of new farming machines and techniques, new land policies, and large land promotional campaigns. Following a long series of public land laws enacted between 1862 and 1912, more people claimed more land in Montana than in any other state. From 1909-1923, 114,620 homestead claims were filed; approximately 32 million acres passed into private hands. Two thousand of those people filing claims did so on property that would later become Petroleum County.¹⁵

About 1909, the Winnett ranch buildings began to give way to a struggling homestead town. Walter Winnett constructed the first buildings, a saloon, general store, and post office. Winnett built the famous Log Cabin Saloon, it is said, to prevent his cowboys from traveling the distance to Grass Range to go to the bar. He, at the very least, saved the miles on his horses by building a saloon nearby.

In 1910, when the Homestead Boom began, Fergus County still encompassed all of present day Petroleum County. Routes to the area consisted of a few roads, passable only in good weather. The largest waves of settlers rolling into eastern Fergus County happened during 1910 and again from 1912-1918. Most new arrivals came by rail, which reached Lewistown, the major town of the region, in 1903. Connecting rails were completed to the towns of Grass Range in 1913 and Roy in 1914. These towns lie to the west of the present day Petroleum County line. Melstone and Musselshell to the south received rail lines in 1908. The railroads greatly aided new homesteaders in reaching the remote lands of present-day Petroleum County. The year 1912 witnessed the largest influx of settlers to an area that, previous to 1910, contained only four post offices (Flatwillow, Edgewater, Weede, Valentine). It grew to include at least twenty-two known post offices by 1922.¹⁶

Oscar Badger and Winnett formed a partnership and started a general store to supply the newly arriving homesteaders. Winnett's freight business brought the supplies from Musselshell or Lewistown. Tony Rasmussen bought the business in 1913 and moved it to his own building after a year. The post office, named Winnett, came into existence on October 4, 1910. John Hughes served as the first postmaster and the mail was delivered from Flatwillow. After the first few years of school in the Winnett house, the Winnett children went to Lewistown for school. By 1912, community growth necessitated the construction of a designated schoolhouse. Known as the little white schoolhouse, this building served about twenty-five students in one 20 x 40 foot room. This building still stands and serves as the Methodist Church.¹⁷

¹⁵ Malone, p. 232, and Petroleum County Public Library, p. 5.

¹⁶ Petroleum County Public Library, p. 5, 52, 102, 203.

¹⁷ Petroleum County Library, p. 597, 629.

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The community struggled to establish and develop its schools. In 1914, Miss Amanda Swift began teaching senior high classes for those interested after the grade school day ended. In 1915-16 formal high school classes took place in the Masonic Rooms, which were on the second floor of the Moll Pool Hall, a building that later became the IOOF Hall and still stands on Main Street (the Masons purchased their own building in 1926). In the 1917-1918 school year, the upper grades moved their classes to the first Eager Mercantile building, which also still stands on Main Street. The first dormitory for country kids was designated in 1917. In 1921, the senior grades finally received a real school building. The old school housed all the grades and the little white schoolhouse was used for shop classes.¹⁸

The Milwaukee Land Company, of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Company, purchased a portion of Mr. Winnett's ranch lands for a town site around 1913 and the town of Winnett was platted in 1914. On July 18, 1914 the first sale of Winnett town lots took place, \$64,000 of town lots were sold. By September of 1914, the first issue of the *Winnett Times* newspaper ran the headline, "Thirty-two Business Houses in Winnett." By the time the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul chugged into town in 1917, Winnett was a growing and thriving little community.¹⁹ The railroad brought new hopes and opportunities with it,

The growth and development of our town and county for the past three years has been wonderful. We have waited patiently and now our dreams are realized. A new era dawns. Our town will take on new life while the farmer who will have a home market will redouble his energies in the cultivation of the soil and in stock raising.²⁰

Walter Winnett remained involved in the development of the community named for him, "W.J. Winnett was a handsome, 210 pound man, forceful in character, a man of strong personality, shrewd, and by this time (c. 1918) acquired enough wealth sufficient to back up his determination to make a city of Winnett, MT."²¹ He constructed the opera house in 1916 and the Winnett Block in 1917, which later became the Petroleum County Courthouse. Due in large part to Mr. Winnett's efforts, on August 5, 1918, Winnett was formally incorporated as part of eastern Fergus County. In addition, he explored new avenues for business. With the arrival of the railroad, Winnett's freighting business became insignificant, so he pursued the building of a Great Western Sugar Company refinery. Blue prints drawn up, site selected, and work about to commence, World War I began and halted forever the plans for the sugar refinery.²²

¹⁸ Petroleum County Library, p. 629-30.

¹⁹ Petroleum County Library, p. 598-600.

²⁰ *Winnett Times*, November 4, 1921, in Hassing, p. 39.

²¹ "The Life of Walter J. Winnett: Winnett, MT," p. 4.

²² "The Life of Walter J. Winnett: Winnett, MT," p. 3.

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While homesteaders continued to arrive in eastern Fergus County until the 1930s, an exodus began in 1918. Within six years since of the major homesteading boom, people began to leave after realizing the impossibility of surviving on 320 acres or less of unforgiving lands. Drought, the end of World War I, the falling market prices, and the flu epidemic of 1918 all contributed to this mass departure. Drying grass, crops, soil and the resulting economic hardships led to bleak years in eastern Fergus County prior to 1920. Homesteaders piled onto railroad cars, heading to new lives at an alarming rate and it appeared that Winnett's heyday would be over almost as quickly as it had begun. The tides turned in February 1920, however, when an oil discovery again brought hope and excitement to the young western town. The discovery, located just west of the Musselshell River near the communities of Mosby and Cat Creek, stemmed the flow of outgoing homesteaders and created boomtowns of Winnett and Cat Creek.

Oil Speculation Brings Change to Winnett

Oil excitement made permanent impressions on the eastern region of Fergus County. The atmosphere in Winnett changed dramatically as soon as news of the oil strike spread. Tent homes and businesses sprang up immediately, as did real estate prices. Reports describe a lot on Main Street selling for \$300 the day before the strike and \$600 the day after.²³ In the second and third days after the discovery, the same lot went to \$900 and increased again to \$2500. Hotels capitalized on the excitement and influx of people by charging guests for eight hour increments. Those who slept more than eight hours encroached on other guests' time and were charged accordingly. In March 1920, the *Fergus County Argus* reported on the new importance of Winnett, "out of Lewistown, all roads in Fergus County lead to Winnett and the remarkable find that has been made in the Mosby oil well."²⁴

By the end of the summer of 1921, approximately 200 businesses operated in Winnett, thirty of those being hotels. One six week period during the summer saw the construction of forty-eight new homes. The railroad, which ran a thrice weekly schedule prior to the strike, began running up to three times daily. Winnett had three oil refineries. The construction of the first, the Great Northern Refinery, began on June 6, 1921. The first tank car of gasoline shipped from Winnett left on November 1, 1921. The Weowna Refinery was originally constructed in Cat Creek by Batchler and Miller and was moved to Winnett in October 1921. In just nineteen days, the building sheltered the refining of gasoline, kerosene, naphtha and fuel oil. It operated into the 1930s. In 1936, the Yale Oil Company won the contract to refine the oil discovered on federal lands; they built a refinery that was demolished the next year when the Continental Oil Co. won the contract. Montana's first oil field journal, the *Oil Fields Bulletin*, located its headquarters in the Winnett Block. The population of

²³ *Fergus County Argus*, March 1920, in Hassing, p. 56.

²⁴ *Fergus County Argus*, March 1920, in Hassing, p. 56.

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Winnett jumped to 1,213 in 1922 and Winnett was reclassified as a city of third class. Estimates put the population at 2,000 in 1923. All of this growth led to city improvement projects such as the building of sidewalks, grading and graveling city streets, constructing a sewer system and improving the water system.²⁵

Petroleum County Emerges

The oil strike led to city and county improvements and to long lasting and significant changes in eastern Fergus County. Long an unsatisfied part of Fergus County, the residents of the eastern lands began to agitate for separation beginning in 1919. After six years of attempts, and the discovery of oil at Cat Creek, the separation became a reality. The years from 1910-1925 constitute the era of "county-busting" in Montana. During this time the number of counties increased from twenty-eight to fifty-six. The arrival of the railroad into difficult to access areas and the rise of wheat production contributed to the splitting of counties, which took place mostly in eastern Montana.²⁶

Eastern Fergus County residents supported the division for three major reasons. First, they felt their distance of approximately fifty miles from Winnett to Lewistown, the county seat, hindered the amount of attention the county paid to its eastern citizens. In particular, they pushed for better roads that would lead to better accessibility and development in their region. They were entitled to these roads, they felt, as the "gate city to the oil fields."²⁷ Better roads bring more people and goods at a faster rate and also help decrease the crime rate, they argued. Second, they wished to spend the tax dollars from eastern Fergus in eastern Fergus. Finally, they rallied around the traditional cry for self-determination, independence, and representation. Many underlying issues also fed into the movement for separation including the belief that many felt Lewistown was trying to overshadow Winnett during the oil boom, especially after papers ran headlines that read, "Lewistown Oil Fields Make Montana Famous."²⁸

The *Winnett Times* wrote in August of 1921,

The immense loss of valuable trade is going to other towns because the pople (sic) cannot get to their nearest city, Winnett, on account of the roads. The fault is not wholly ours, we being unfortunate enough to belong to a county which has continued for a

²⁵ Petroleum County Public Library, p. 614-617.

²⁶ Joanne Marie Hassing, "The Creation of Petroleum County: A Case Study in 'County Busting,'" Master's thesis, University of Montana, 1964, p. 1.

²⁷ Hassing, p. 135.

²⁸ Hassing, p. 160.

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score of years to take the tax money from one part of the county and build the best roads and bridges money can buy for another part. A new county will solve the difficulty but in the mean time the business men of this town are losing a good many thousand dollars every month because people cannot get to this town.²⁹

C.J. Doherty used his position as editor of the *Winnett Times* to voice the cause of the divisionists; this contributed greatly to increasing awareness and voter turn-out for the movement. In the end, the oil discovery produced the name of the county and the greatest impetus for division. From 1917-1920, Montana suffered from a drought that resulted in an economic depression and delinquent taxes; however, the oil strike afforded eastern Fergus County enough valuation, by law, to separate.³⁰

In no way united on the issue, residents of eastern Fergus County battled for six years over the subject of separation. The first attempts for division were in the forms of bills presented to the state legislature. Four separate bills to create another county out of eastern Fergus hit the House and Senate floor from 1919 to 1921. These attempts failed mostly due to the disagreement among residents over the boundaries of the new county. In addition, especially as the campaign continued, the anti-divisionists of the region feared that a split would lead to bankruptcy because of the economically depressed agricultural lands. The divisionists, on the other hand, feared that Lewistown would not allow a separation after the oil fields were fully developed.

In April of 1921, well known professional county splitter and agitator, Daniel McKay, arrived in Winnett. The following portion of an editorial ran in the *Fergus County Argus*, "Dan McKay visits the oil fields ... Presumably from this report the industrious Dan is becoming interested in oil. Our guess is otherwise, however. Having just completed the creation of Banner county ... we believe that Dan is looking around for other spoils..."³¹ The new tactic of petition and election, where the residents present a petition to the county commissioners for approval and then a vote by residents was adopted. From April 1922 to June 1924, eastern Fergus County presented the county commissioners with three petitions for separation. The first two petitions never made it to a vote. Finally, in June of 1924, the commissioners set a date for a vote on the split. On November 4, 1924 residents of eastern Fergus County voted to separate from the larger county. The new county government began operation on February 22, 1925.³²

Excitement and pride exuded from Winnett during those first few years as it served as the new county seat. However, by the eve of the Great Depression trouble had already stuck its foot in the door. The common problems faced by new counties everywhere also existed in the newly formed Petroleum

²⁹ *Winnett Times*, August 12, 1921 in Hassing, p. 136.

³⁰ Hassing, p. 164-175.

³¹ *Fergus County Argus*, April 8, 1921 in Hassing, p. 92.

³² Hassing, p. 68-92.

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County. New governments, their courthouses and employees cost money. In addition, Petroleum County, in its fervor to show its legitimacy, invested heavily in new roads and fell deep into debt. During the boom times, property tax hikes covered many costs, but during the busts, counties seized lands for delinquent taxes and Petroleum County, just as many others, devoured its own property owners in the years following its creation.³³

The 1930s and the Great Depression gave way to World War II and more prosperous years. The local government in Petroleum County continued to struggle, however. The debt it accrued by building roads and other services during the 1920s multiplied during the Depression. The decrease in privately owned property led to a drop off in property tax operating revenue for the county. At the start of the 1940s, the county asked Roland R. Renne, president of Montana State College (now Montana State University), to investigate another form of government for the struggling region. He suggested the county manager form and the county adopted it in 1942. Petroleum is the only county in Montana that operates under a county manager form of government.

A County Manager

The county manager form of government revolves around a manager appointed by the county commissioners. The manager, in turn, appoints positions that otherwise are elected. Offices and duties are condensed to limit the number of personnel and to save money. The duties of the County Superintendent of Schools and the assessor had already been combined in 1938, as had the duties of the public administrator and coroner, which were placed under the responsibilities of the sheriff. In 1946, after adoption of the county manager plan, the manager assumed the responsibilities of the superintendent of schools and the assessor. Appointed positions, formally elected, included the clerk and recorder, auditor, assessor, treasurer, superintendent of schools, and surveyor.

The county manager plan reduced expenditures as well as debt. In the first year under the county manager plan, the personnel costs for the county fell dramatically, resulting in considerable savings. Before, the county personnel consisted of three county commissioners and thirteen officials who made a combined \$14,283 per year. After, the three commissioners remained, but the county operated under the direction of just five employees being paid \$7,690 per year. At the time of adoption of the county manager plan, the county had \$20,706 in outstanding warrants and \$40,000 bonded indebtedness. By 1946, the bond debt had been paid off and the county had only \$131 in outstanding warrants.³⁴

³³ Malone, p. 252, and Hassing, p. 180.

³⁴ Harold G. Halcrow, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, *County Manager Government in Montana*, Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, Bozeman, MT, September 1949, and Gail Shaw and Sandy Hanson, "Factual History of Petroleum County," Petroleum County History Files, vertical file, Winnett.

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History of the Winnett Block

Mr. Winnett signed the deed on land that included where the Winnett Block would eventually be built August 8, 1892, although the deed was not filed until June 13, 1895.³⁵ Beginning in 1914, with the Milwaukee Land Company sale of town lots, the town of Winnett grew quickly. Mr. Winnett timed the construction of his commercial building with the arrival of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad and the symbol of stability it brought with it. Construction of the Winnett Block finished just after the arrival of the first train to Winnett in 1917.

The Winnett Block provided much needed commercial space in the growing business area. Eastern European stonemasons were employed to construct the Winnett Block under the guidance of Mr. Winnett.³⁶ The sandstone was quarried from Eagle Point, the point at the west end of the Rimrocks above town, and was referred to as Eagle sandstone. Lumber was transported by wagon from Grass Range.

Three businesses shared the first floor; these divisions are visible in historic photographs. The First State Bank, the *Winnett Times* print shop and the Montana Lumber and Hardware Company occupied the first floor. The basement housed a restaurant and the third floor contained business offices. Various reports claim that the basement also housed a place of ill repute during the 1920s oil boom. In 1921, Mr. Teagarden moved the printing of the *Oil Fields Bulletin*, Montana's first oil journal, from Lewistown to the Winnett Block into rooms previously occupied by Attorney Geis.³⁷

Mr. Winnett sold the building to Benjamin Lepper in 1928 who remodeled it into a courthouse and leased it to Petroleum County for \$200 a month. At this time, the façade received its first changes (see 1950's photo). The county received the option to buy for \$31,000 with lease money applied to the price. Gunda Lewis, a child during the 1930s, recalled that during the Depression the basement of the building stored goods before they were distributed. Other occupants included the WPA (Works Program Administration) who operated a relief office here, and a library. The Petroleum County Attorney occupied an office on the second floor. Holding the position from 1943-67, George Ore was the last Petroleum County Attorney; his name is still printed on his office door. With Ore's resignation, Petroleum County began using the services of the Fergus County Attorney. The County

³⁵ Petroleum County Deeds and Records, Book 20, Page 116, Winnett, MT.

³⁶ Three different sources each report that the stonemasons were Croatian, Slovakian, and Russian, respectively.

³⁷ Petroleum County Public Library, p. 626; Petroleum County Deeds and Records; Jim Dullenty "Petroleum Co. Courthouse is an important building with colorful history." *Lewistown News Argus*, 2007.

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purchased the building in 1942, after the passing of Mr. Lepper, and it continues to serve them today.³⁸

The main floor of the Winnett Block has housed county government offices and a courtroom since 1928. The courtroom is completely contained in the center of the middle floor with entrances at the back (south), left and right (west and east) sides, and at the front right (northeast) corner.

Lorriane Bauer, Petroleum County Manager contracted with the firm of John Valach and Son in 1979 to remodel the basement. John Valach had helped to construct other masonry buildings in Winnett during the 1910s and '20s. John's son, Frank Valach, performed most of the work for over three years from 1979-1982. When work began, the center of the building was sinking and the floors sloped toward the middle due to failing support posts in the basement. For many years, the basement had been used for storage and was full of ashes, coal, old furnace parts and other discarded items. Remains of cubicles built out of 2" x 6" posts and with walls filled with sawdust still existed from the oil boom days. Before work could begin to fix the variety of issues, access to the basement was created. Workers cut an opening in the foundation wall on the north side of the building and built a ramp on which they drove a skid steer full of loads of debris. The cubicles were also removed. At that time, jail cells existed on the east side of the floor. These were removed and later a portable cell was placed in the northeast corner. A kitchen and two bathrooms were added and an elevator was installed at the north wall. Valach stabilized the building by pouring two four foot wide parallel footings of reinforced concrete at the basement floor level. He jacked the floor joists to the proper height and installed new posts and glulam beams the length of the building. They determined that a high water table and water leaking into the basement caused the disrepair and so they installed two automatic sump pumps and poured a new concrete floor. The existing fireplace was reworked and used to provide a flue for a new brick fireplace. Salvaged "Slater" bricks from the Walter Winnett house were incorporated into the mantle. Valach also worked to waterproof the west wall and on a new sidewalk.³⁹ The basement is currently used as a public meeting area and utilized mainly by the Winnett Senior Citizens.

The Courthouse has remained largely unchanged since the 1979 remodel. In the 1990's minor exterior restoration work was performed by Frank Valach's son, Robert.⁴⁰

Architectural Significance

³⁸ Petroleum County Public Library, p. 626; Jim Dullenty "Petroleum Co. Courthouse is an important building with colorful history." *Lewistown News Argus*, 2007.

³⁹ Frank Valach, Interview by Laura Nowlin, December 22, 2008. Frank Valach home, Lewistown, MT.

⁴⁰ Ibid

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The style of the Winnett Block is considered Western Commercial, a style that differs somewhat from the Commercial style. According to Marcus Whiffen, the Commercial style is often “five to sixteen stories with straight fronts, flat roofs, and level skylines. The character of the façade derives from the fenestration, to which any ornament – often there is none – is altogether subordinate. The pattern is entirely regular. The windows are rectangular, very large, and variously divided... bay windows are often employed. The total area of glass normally exceeds that of the brick or other structural material.... A cornice of moderate projection is the commonest upper termination of the façade, though many have been removed in the interests of safety.”⁴¹

The Western Commercial style is typically less than five stories, built of brick masonry with numerous windows stacked in columns, and is capped by a flat roof and a cornice, parapet, and/or simple corbelling. A building of this style typically rests on a raised foundation, is mostly without ornament, and has a more utilitarian appearance. The Winnett Block, as discussed in Section 7, displays nearly all of these stylistic elements. The architectural significance and integrity of the Winnett Block renders it eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

Conclusion

The Winnett Block, now known as the Petroleum County Courthouse, was constructed as an anchor of the community and today stands as one of the last landmark buildings in Winnett. The Winnett Block is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, B, and C for its many associations with the development of the town of Winnett and Petroleum County, with Mr. Winnett, and for its unique architectural style in the town.

Completed in 1917, the Winnett Block stood during the height of growth and homestead activity in Winnett in the late 1910s, during the height of the oil boom in the early 1920s, and during the devastating years of drought and depression in the late 1920s and 1930s. As a business block, the building represents the growth of the surrounding community and the importance of commerce to the area. The Winnett Block is the last remaining building to be associated with Mr. Walter Winnett in Petroleum County. As a county courthouse, the building represents Petroleum County's fight to separate from Fergus County; it has served as the house of government since 1928 and as the only building housing a county manager form of government in Montana since 1942. As a stone building and business block, the building is unique in the small town of Winnett, which contains no other stone buildings or buildings the size of the Winnett Block.

⁴¹ Marcus Whiffen, “American Architecture Since 1780” (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, Revised Edition 1993): 183.

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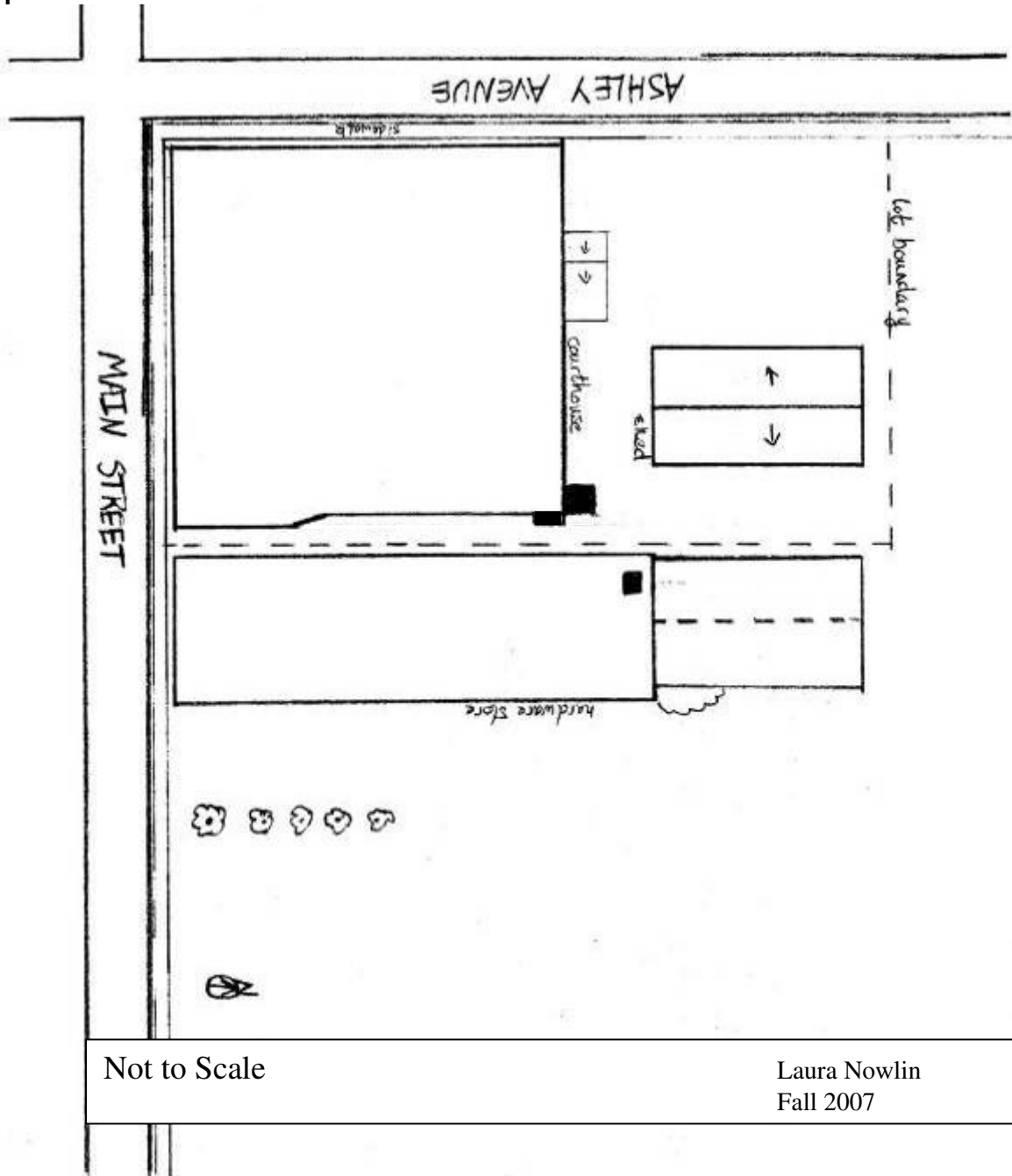
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Sketch Map

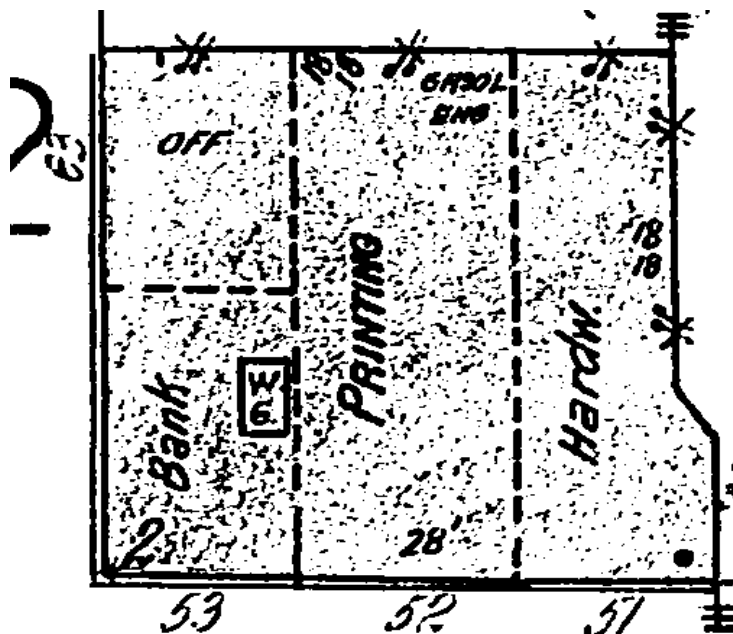


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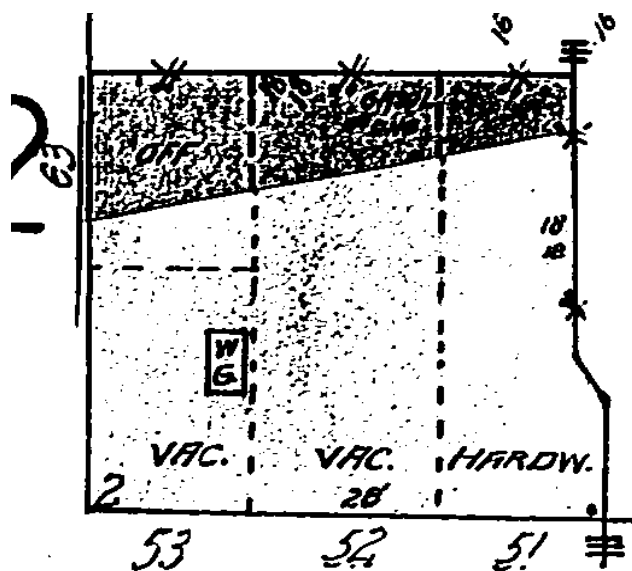
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Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps



1922



1922-1929

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In accordance with the March 2005 Photo Policy expansion, the photos that accompany this nomination are printed on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper, using a Hewlett Packard 100 gray photo cartridge. This combination of paper and inks is included on the NR's list of "Acceptable Ink and Paper combinations for Digital Images." The images are also recorded on an archival CD-R with a resolution at least 1200x1800 pixels, 300 dpi in "true color" 24-bit format.

PHOTO LOG

Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south elevation

Photograph Number: 00001

Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south and west elevations

Photograph Number: 00002

Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, west elevation

Photograph Number: 00003

Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, north and west elevations

Photograph Number: 00004

Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, north elevation; shed, north elevation

Photograph Number: 00005

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: April, 2009
Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, north elevation; shed, east and north elevations
Photograph Number: 00006

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: April, 2009
Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, east elevation with hardware store in foreground
Photograph Number: 00007

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: April, 2009
Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south and east elevations with next door hardware store
Photograph Number: 00008

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: April, 2009
Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south and east elevations
Photograph Number: 00009

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing county offices
Photograph Number: 00010

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing courtroom
Photograph Number: 00011

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing typical door detail
Photograph Number: 00012

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing staircase
Photograph Number: 00013

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing lobby area of second floor
Photograph Number: 00014

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing basement
Photograph Number: 00015

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing basement fireplace, larger vertical bricks are Slater bricks from the Winnett House
Photograph Number: 00016

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing basement
Photograph Number: 00017

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: 1919
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block with Jacob Vogel, Ella Dyer, and William Dyer in foreground. View to the north.
Photograph Number: 00018

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: October 10, 1917
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, nearly completed when first train arrived. View to the northeast.
Photograph Number: 00019

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: Circa 1920, published in anniversary paper, July 16, 1964
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, From *Winnett Times*, Winnett Montana, July 16, 1964, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition. View to the north-northeast.
Photograph Number: 00020

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: circa late 1940s/early 1950s
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block Postcard. View to the north.
Photograph Number: 00021

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: circa 1920
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library
Description and view of camera: Walter J. Winnett, sketch from "Winnett, Founder of Oil Metropolis, Talks of Time When He Was With Sioux and in Confidence of Sitting Bull," *The Fergus County Argus*.
Photograph Number: 00022

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: 1913/1914
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

Winnett Block
Name of Property

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Description and view of camera: Winnett in 1913 or 1914, the Log Cabin Saloon is the first building on the right, *photo courtesy of the Petroleum County Public Library (PCPL)*. View to the west down Main Street.
Photograph Number: 00023

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: 1913/1914
Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library
Description and view of camera: Equipment at the railroad depot in Winnett headed for the oil fields, *photo courtesy of the PCPL*. View to the northeast
Photograph Number: 00024

Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Artist: Owen Storer
Date of Sketch: Circa 1970
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: 2008
Location of original negative: digital file kept by Laura Nowlin
Description and view of camera: Walter J. Winnett House. View to the southeast.
Photograph Number: 00025

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south elevation

Photograph Number: 00001

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south and west elevations

Photograph Number: 00002

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, west elevation

Photograph Number: 00003

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, north and west elevations

Photograph Number: 00004

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, north elevation; shed, north elevation

Photograph Number: 00005

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, north elevation; shed, east and north elevations

Photograph Number: 00006

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, east elevation with hardware store in foreground

Photograph Number: 00007

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: April, 2009
Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south and east elevations with next door hardware store
Photograph Number: 00008

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: April, 2009

Location of original negative: Digital photo held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, south and east elevations

Photograph Number: 00009

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing county offices

Photograph Number: 00010

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing courtroom

Photograph Number: 00011

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing typical door detail
Photograph Number: 00012

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: December, 2009
Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing staircase
Photograph Number: 00013

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing lobby area of second floor

Photograph Number: 00014

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing basement

Photograph Number: 00015

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing basement fireplace, larger vertical bricks are Slater bricks from the Winnett House

Photograph Number: 00016

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Laura Nowlin

Date of Photograph: December, 2009

Location of original negative: held by Laura Nowlin, Cheyenne, WY

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, interior showing basement

Photograph Number: 00017

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Winnett Block
Name of Property

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County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Unknown

Date of Photograph: October 10, 1917

Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, nearly completed when first train arrived. View to the northeast.

Photograph Number: 00019

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Unknown

Date of Photograph: Circa 1920, published in anniversary paper, July 16, 1964

Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

Description and view of camera: Winnett Block, From *Winnett Times*, Winnett Montana, July 16, 1964, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition. View to the north-northeast.

Photograph Number: 00020

Winnett Block

Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT

County and State

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Unknown

Date of Photograph: circa late 1940s/early 1950s

Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

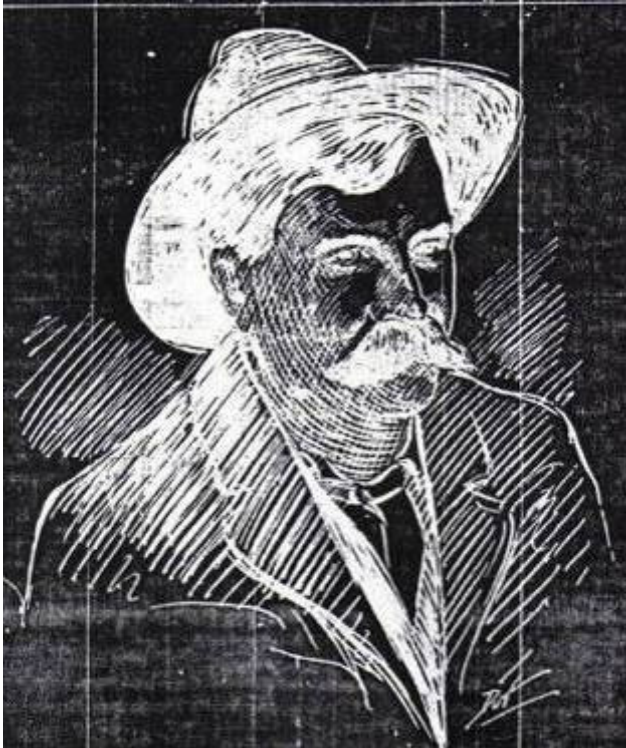
Description and view of camera: Winnett Block Postcard. View to the north.

Photograph Number: 00021

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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Unknown

Date of Photograph: circa 1920

Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

Description and view of camera: Walter J. Winnett, sketch from "Winnett, Founder of Oil Metropolis, Talks of Time When He Was With Sioux and in Confidence of Sitting Bull," *The Fergus County Argus*.

Photograph Number: 00022

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
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Name: Winnett Block

County and State: Petroleum County, Montana

Photographer: Unknown

Date of Photograph: 1913/1914

Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

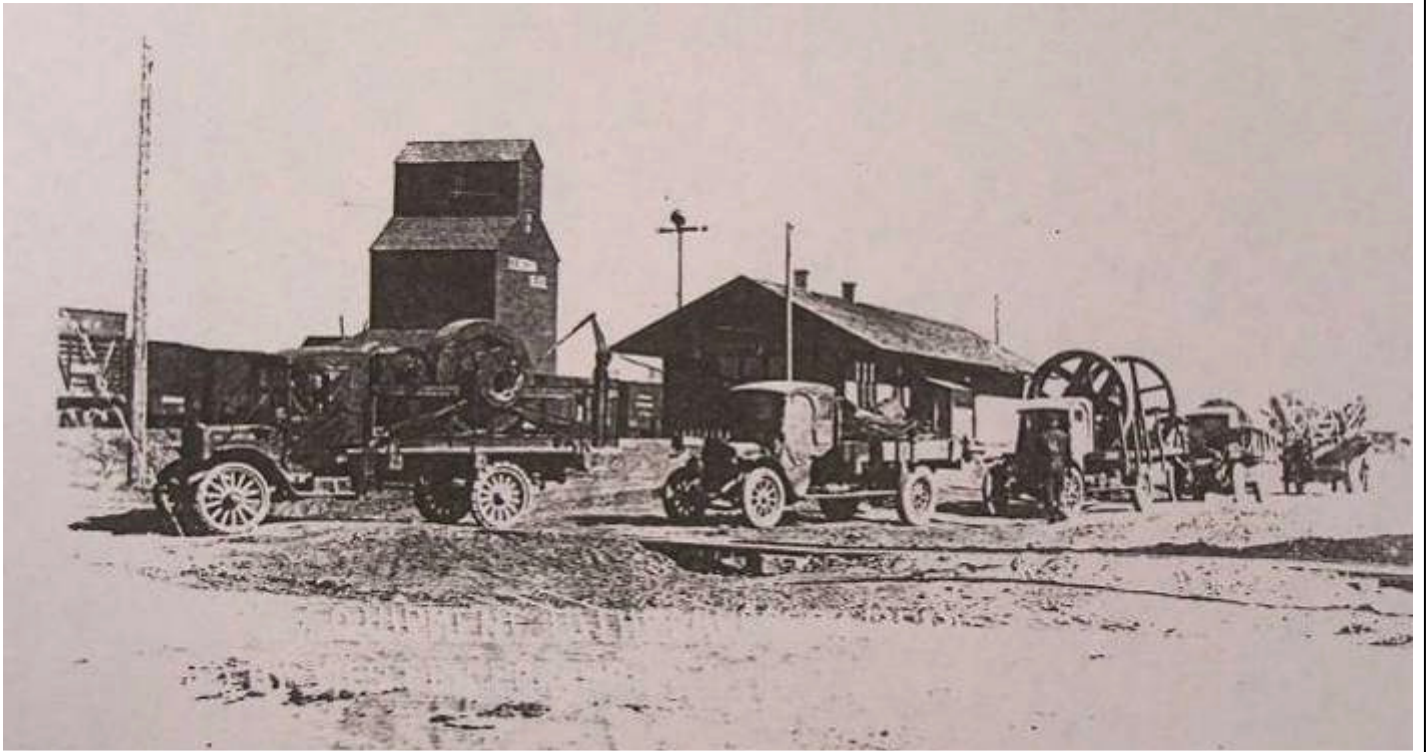
Description and view of camera: Winnett in 1913 or 1914, the Log Cabin Saloon is the first building on the right, *photo courtesy of the Petroleum County Public Library (PCPL)*. View to the west down Main Street.

Photograph Number: 00023

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Date of Photograph: 1913/1914

Location of original negative: Petroleum County Public Library

Description and view of camera: Equipment at the railroad depot in Winnett headed for the oil fields, *photo courtesy of the PCPL* View to the northeast

Photograph Number: 00024

Winnett Block
Name of Property

Petroleum County, MT
County and State

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Name: Winnett Block
County and State: Petroleum County, Montana
Artist: Owen Storer
Date of Sketch: Circa 1970
Photographer: Laura Nowlin
Date of Photograph: 2008
Location of original negative: digital file kept by Laura Nowlin
Description and view of camera: Walter J. Winnett House. View to the southeast.
Photograph Number: 00025